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JAPANESE ART.*

BY SIR RUTHERFORD ALCOCK, K.C.B., D.C.L.

IN the preceding article on Japanese Art I referred to the interest attaching to the progress of the Arts in different countries as affording certain landmarks of civilisation, by which some judgment might be formed of the social progress, and extent of refinement, attained at various periods. I am unwilling that this important principle should be lost sight of, because it receives a new illustration in Japan. We know very little indeed of what took place in that country before the close of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese first landed on its shores, and still less of the kind or extent of the civilisation attained by them in the earlier epochs of their history. But, if there be any truth in the opinion which has been put forward by some writers on Art, that where civil and religious tyranny has prevailed, the progress of the useful and elegant Arts has been slow and laborious, the history of Japan would not have prepared us for the degree of excellence the Japanese have actually arrived at in this direction. Religion, climate, political tyranny and liberty—each in turn has been held to exercise a



Fig. 1.

strong controlling influence over the Arts. These, it has been said, have "flourished more or less according to the liberty allowed the artist, and the state of respect in which he was held by his fellow man." The degree of influence, however, exercised under any of these heads must be very variable in

different ages and circumstances. The long decay of Art in Greece, where once it made its home, and achieved its greatest triumphs, can hardly be satisfactorily accounted for by any changes either political or religious; while the climate has of course continued to impart the same inspiring influences to all who dwelt in the land. So far as bright skies and beautiful scenery, with all the various flora and foliage of a tropic and

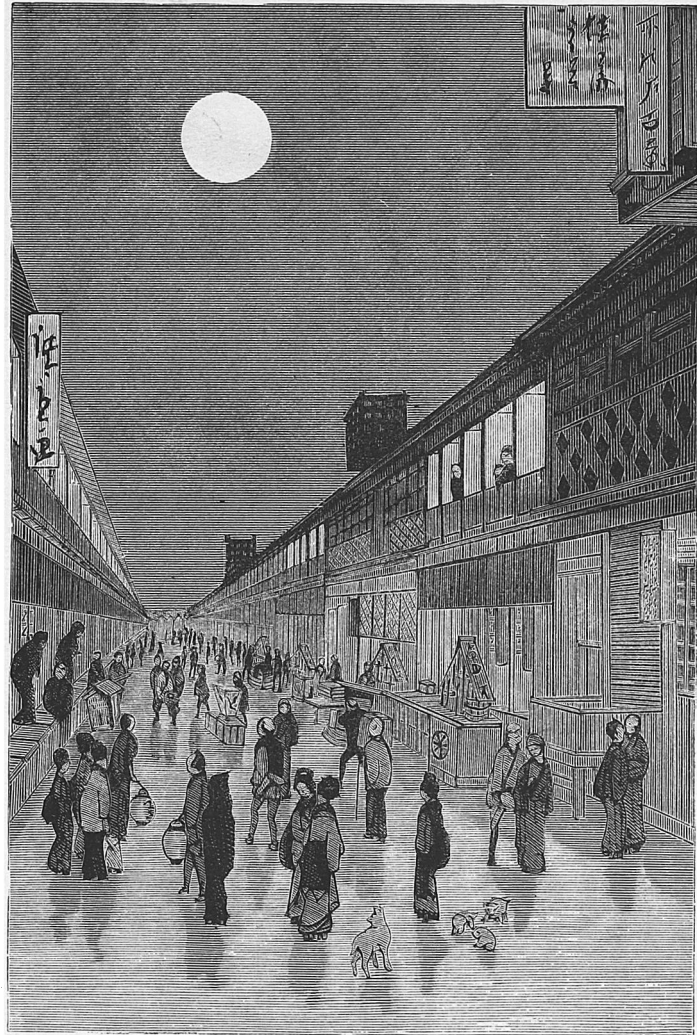


Fig. 2.

temperate climate combined, can influence artistic development, the Japanese have had all these in perfection. But their government has always been restrictive, narrow, and tyrannical; while national customs and long isolation from the rest of the world have still more limited the range of their ideas and scope of their efforts. Art in Japan has only been developed under these conditions. And if it were true, as Ruskin assumes, that there are only two Fine Arts possible to the human race—sculpture and painting—the Japanese can put forward no valid claim to be considered artists. They are neither sculptors nor painters. On the other hand, if high Art "consists in the carving or painting natural objects, chiefly figures;"—a further dictum of the same writer—and "that it has always subject and meaning, never consisting solely in arrangement of lines, or even of colours," and "always paints or carves something that it sees or believes in—nothing ideal or uncredited—and for the most part, it paints and carves the men and things that are visible around it,"—the Japanese may take rank among the

* Continued from page 105.

foremost cultivators of art in the reproduction of the men and animals that are visible around them in various materials. This may not show their possession of the higher artistic nature of the Greek, but they have not the less produced, and do now daily produce, works in metal and in ivory which may fairly challenge comparison with some of the best-cut medallions and statuettes of the Grecian and Roman periods. I believe this excellence to be chiefly due to their patient and minute study of nature, more



Fig. 3.

especially in animal life, and in flowers and plants. In birds, particularly, they excel in depicting every character with rare fidelity and spirit. Horses and other quadrupeds they have never mastered, strange to say, and to this day they only produce, as a rule, distorted caricatures, when they attempt to draw them. The human face, and the figure if draped, they can handle well with chisel or pencil. The former, more especially in all its grotesque or humorous phases of expression, they often render



Fig. 4.

in the most perfect manner. We must not be surprised to find that the Japanese standard of the graceful and the beautiful is something different from our own—in colour, form, and the combination of the two. Hogarth's line of beauty refers to a law which may have many diversities of expression. A wavy or serpentine line analogous to Hogarth's has, however, great attractions to the Japanese. The conventional type of the Japanese women, perpetually reproduced in all their pictorial illustrations, though never really seen in actual life, is a combination of wavy lines, of which Fig. 1 is a fair specimen.

It is singular that in nearly all Asiatic countries each nation has adopted a strictly conventional type to be perpetuated on monuments and in pictorial records, only remotely representing the characteristic features of the people themselves. The ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Persian, have all been so handed down to posterity. It may perhaps be accounted for, in part at least, by the facility it afforded to inferior workmen to reproduce one stereotyped form without



Fig. 5.

much exercise of individual artistic skill. In Japanese drawings there is certainly one type for the Daimios and privileged classes—a purely conventional one, unlike anything to be seen among them. A sort of exaggerated rendering of what, in lesser degree, is popularly attributed to the Norman blood, in contradistinction to the Saxons or aborigines of these islands. The common people, in their pictures and carvings, are always rendered in the likeness of what may be



Fig. 6.

daily seen in the streets—a lower type of face, always caricatured, farcical and grotesque, but still representing the national features with a great deal of truth and force. The figures in No. 1 show this conventional type of the Daimio class, as well as the serpentine wavy line so much admired by the Japanese.

The subject of another picture now before me is a snow-scene, and two children blowing or sucking their fingers convey as strong a feeling of intense cold as the snow on the ground and the overhanging branches. The principal figure,

a lady of Kioto, is very gracefully designed, and the touches of colour in the dress, the flowers on the outer garment being blue on a madder ground, while the under-skirt is of a warmer tint, harmonising with the dresses of the children, make a very effective picture. This appears on the wooden cover of a series



Fig. 7.

of illustrations of their national customs—a common mode of binding such books—and the designs are often of the most graceful kind.

A third, from a similar book, is an excellent illustration, not only of a free and flowing outline of a peculiarly graceful and undulating character, but of their love of the grotesque, and power of effectively portraying incidents and grouping figures in humorous action. A child has, intentionally or otherwise, got



Fig. 8.

its kite entangled with the dress of a man passing by, and is in evident ecstasy at the trouble it occasions to the two-sworded retainer. The action of both figures is very good.

Mr. Leighton's opinion as to their want of pictorial power, I think therefore must be taken with qualifications. In many of their commonest illustrated works—woodcuts stamped in colours in the mode described by that artist—nearly all the elements of a good picture may be found. The night-

scene in Theatre Street at Yedo (Fig. 2), may serve as an example. The dark indigo blue of the sky, in which a full moon appears, and the red light showing the open windows, as well as the parti-coloured groups of people in the street, are full of picturesque details, standing well out



Fig. 9.

on the pale grey ground of the street, while the perspective is very well preserved.

Considering how well and vigorously they can draw the human figure in action, and with every variety of grotesque and humorous expression, one is disposed to wonder that they have never learned to draw both hands and feet with something like correctness. In these, however, as in the drawing of quadrupeds, they invariably and grotesquely



Fig. 10.

fail. Birds, on the contrary, but more especially storks and wild fowl, they both paint and model with a fidelity and thorough mastery, such as the best European artists might envy. As regards the human figure, it cannot be from a want of knowledge of anatomy, for we have no reason to suppose that the Greeks ever dissected the human body for the purpose of acquiring such knowledge. As to familiarity with the nude—from which it is more natural to conclude the Grecians derived their power of accurately and gracefully reproducing all the most beautiful lines and proportions of the

human figure—the Japanese have had that advantage in perfection. Constant opportunities for studying the nude, not only in the bath-houses, where both sexes mix promiscuously for hours, without restraint; but in the streets and on the roads in summer, it is the exception to see a working man with any clothing beyond a loincloth—much too scant to interfere with artistic requirements. In selecting examples of their power in



Fig. 11.

grotesque and humorous renderings of popular life, and the human figure in action, if draped, without any obvious defect of drawing except in the hands and feet, the difficulty arises from an *embarras de richesse*. Several were given in the "Capital of the Tycoon," and I will only add a few illustrations of their art in this particular department here.

There is no more fertile subject of satire and caricature in



Fig. 12.

Japan than mothers-in-law. They do not, as a class, enjoy an enviable repute in most countries, but it is curious to find in these remote islands of the East, how constantly the artist's pencil is employed to hold them up to popular odium. In European family relations, however, it is generally the mother of the wife that appears on the scene as an element of household

trouble; whereas in Japan it is the husband's mother—who, if a widow, generally resides with a son, and rules both the house and the wife, to the latter's sorrow. In a book now before me, filled with clever illustrations of popular manners and customs, it is amusing to note how many of the drawings, with their accompanying epigrams, are devoted to this side of domestic life. Fig. 3, the first in the book, represents a mother-in-law supposed to have been superintending the practising of the young wife on some kind of musical instrument, in order that she may become a source of profit, and finishing with a lecture. The epigraph to the left, in the current Hirakana character, is here reproduced, merely to show how all the series carry their comment. These are somewhat enigmatical, often using words alike in sound, but with a double sense, not easy to follow, and very difficult of translation, being, in addition, versified and made obscure by an ingenious involution of sound and sense. The mother-in-law is admirably drawn in front of the daughter, kneeling very submissively to receive her scolding. They are coloured woodcuts, and are equally to be admired for the artistic assortment and contrasts of colour, and the bold handling shown in the outline and grouping.

Fig. 4 represents the mother taking to task a daughter-

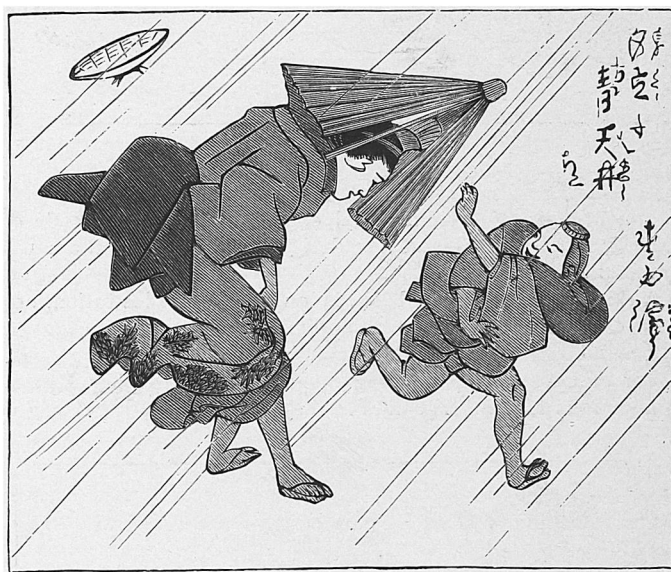


Fig. 13.

in-law reproached with idleness in her work, thrown on the floor, and to which her attention is directed by the maternal censor, while by the side is the further evidence against her in the paper lantern, which has but one needle puncture in it, instead of being covered with holes where the needle of the busy workwoman is always thrust as a kind of pincushion, when different coloured threads are employed. The lowly attitude of patient submission of the scolded daughter is again very graphically rendered.

Fig. 5 reproduces a somewhat similar scene, in which both mother and daughter-in-law are well represented both in attitude and expression.

The interest of the group (Fig. 6) turns on another phase of conjugal and maternal relations. The daughter-in-law, on her knees before the awe-inspiring mother, is being subjected to a kind of scrutiny, the day after her bridal, as to her personal attractions, which has nothing flattering in its motive. It appears she has brought money into the family, having been particularly ill-favoured, and among other personal shortcomings was said to have a face without a nose. She certainly not represented by the artist as anything attractive, but as the old beldame, with spectacles on nose, is scrutinising, she discovers that there *is* a nose, though there is even less of a bridge to it than Japanese and Mongol faces usually present.

Turning the pages we come upon an illustration of domestic

medicine (Fig. 7). It represents the application of a *moxa*—a small cone of cotton, which is allowed to burn down to the skin, as a remedy for nearly every ill to which flesh is heir. In this case it is going to be applied to the foot for a pain in the head—as a derivative probably, according to medical theories not unknown in the west.

The two figures in Fig. 8 represent two women in the road, walking in their clogs, which are a curiosity in themselves, and, like stilts, require great practice in the wearer. It will be observed in these, and all the series, that the figures are walking, as it were, in the air—that is, no ground is ever represented. However incongruous or unartistic this may appear to us, it must be remembered that the same custom prevailed in Greek Art. The frescoes on the walls of Pompeian houses, and in the Roman villas laid open by recent excavations, all furnish examples. The inscription purports that women are like water-streams—that is, of little account. The touches of scarlet in the dresses of both contrast with the purples and greys with a subtle harmony, and make an effective picture.

Fig. 9 gives a group full of expression and wavy lines—a woman with her servant, or slave, carrying her baggage—while the two creatures at their feet, meant for dogs, illustrate the defective way in which they always depict four-footed animals.

In the figure (No. 10) a female is peering through the door of a house, formed by the usual sliding and papered panel, and is both listening and observing what is going on outside. The easy attitude and simplicity of outline cannot fail to strike the eye, while the bright scarlet colour of the sash, or band, at the back—the Japanese form of a 'dress improver,' and worn outside the dress, for use and ornament combined—contrasts pleasantly with the neutral tint of the skirt and body.

Fig. 11 shows a mother-in-law reconciled to the presence of a son's wife in the house, on ascertaining the birth of a grandson—progeny of the male sex being the desire of all, in order to secure due performance of the annual rites at the graves of the departed, without which the spirits of the dead find no rest; and are supposed under such circumstances to haunt their former abodes with no very kindly feelings towards their relations and the human kind in general.

Fig. 12 is, I am told, borrowed from the Chinese. The son returns from school to his mother, who works hard all day to earn their daily bread and educate her only son. He tells her he has now finished and learnt enough, upon which the mother at her loom cuts asunder the threads of her web, and shows him by example that there is no time when we can say our work is done, or there is nothing more to learn. And the apologue appropriately concludes that the son took the lesson to heart, and became a learned man, leaving a great name behind him.

Lastly, for there must be a limit, here (Fig. 13) is an illustration of the poet's words, which tell us that "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," and is otherwise full of the broad humour and grotesque exaggeration in which the Japanese delight. An unhappy female pedestrian is caught in a violent storm of wind and rain, which splits her umbrella of oiled paper and sends her hat flying, while she is vainly trying with one hand to keep her skirts from following in the same distracting way—to the mocking delight of a Yedo street arab, different in outward garb to the gamins of Paris or our own graceless urchins, but unmistakably of the same genus. The pitiless rain is well given in a few slanting lines, and the whole scene is worthy of Hogarth. The cleverness with which the most varied expression is given to the different heads and figures, but especially the faces, by a few touches of the pencil—the truest test, perhaps, of artistic power, is worthy of note. Despite all defects of drawing, the picture is precisely what the draughtsman intended, and tells the tale with great success.

I think it will be seen from these illustrations that, although the arts in Japan may not reflect the whole range of thought the nation is capable of, they afford indications of the stage of development reached, and exhibit many leading characteristics of the popular mind, as well as the tastes and customs of the people.

In thus passing rapidly in review some of the leading characteristics of Japanese Art, as it has found expression with pencil and graver, I cannot help feeling how much remains to be said before any complete view can be given. It was well observed to me not long ago by a correspondent in discussing this subject: "To feel and even instinctively understand the merit and character of a work of Art is one thing; to explain its origin, development, connection, and influences, is very different."

It is difficult to turn over a collection of these popular books of woodcuts and illustrations, coloured and plain, of which there is an immense store, without being struck by the European character of some of the landscapes. Though the forms of nature and vegetation are native, there is a knowledge of linear perspective, and a manner of presenting the scene, which would seem to indicate a familiarity with the Italian methods of the seventeenth century. And the question arises, Did the Jesuit Fathers teach drawing in their schools, or occupy themselves with the Arts, as some of those at the court of Peking, in the reign of Kanghi, unquestionably did?—they introduced, among other things, the use of vignette medallions on the best china, never prior to that adopted in the ornamentation of Chinese porcelain. Then, again, some of the caricatures and illustrations of popular customs, in all their grotesqueness and coarseness, powerfully recall the Dutch engravings of a like kind of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the Höllen, Ostade, and Teniers style. The Japanese themselves do not admit any tuition from these sources, neither in perspective nor treatment of subjects for the pencil. But when we reflect on the aptitude they have shown to assimilate and imitate European arts and manners in the present day, one cannot help seeing the possibility of their having adopted something in the way of Art. They must have had the opportunity, during the greater part of a century, from the first arrival of the Portuguese and European missionaries, to their final expulsion under Taiko Sama and his successor. The Jesuit Fathers have left traces of Italian forms in Hindoo buildings; they may well have done far more in Japan. To answer this question, however, with any certainty, it would be necessary to be able to classify the woodcut illustrations and painting on china of the Japanese chronologically and with perfect accuracy. Who can attempt to do this? I have never known a Japanese who made any pretension to such knowledge, except in lacquer and bronzes, or in swords. The works themselves are for the most part without marks or dates.

As to their pictorial power, I have already intimated a dissent from Mr. Leighton's somewhat disparaging estimate. Whether it be original, or borrowed from the West, is another question. I am inclined, however, to believe it is their own—original and not borrowed. In their common little books, with their rude woodcuts—rude as regards finish or costliness of execution—there are many bits of landscape and moonshine full of mystery, and artistic to a high degree. It will be difficult to match from any English woodcut such effects of misty, struggling light as are often produced in these. I hope, in a succeeding paper, to make this clearer by a few illustrations taken from the books before me. I should be sorry to close an account, however imperfect, of Japanese Art, without an opportunity of giving some evidence of the great variety of styles their different artists have excelled in; and this can only be done by the help of woodcuts.

In small figure delineation, clever grouping, and vigorous action, I do not think the Japanese inferior to the European, except in regard to sentiment and the type of beauty. Subtle or delicate shades of sentiment do not appear to be characteristic of the Japanese themselves, and certainly their types of female beauty have little in common with ours. A critic full of admiration for the Japanese artistic work, and with all the qualifications of a critic derived from wide experience and familiarity with many schools and peoples, remarked to me, while turning over some of these pictorial books, "These artists are not worshippers of beauty. Do they know what beauty is in the human form? They can see it in landscape, in the moonlight, in foliage, in the motion and attitudes of fish and fowl: above all in the sportiveness and grace of little wood-creatures, in the squirrel or the like. Why then is every man and every

woman a caricature--a fright? Why is there not a trace of a *type of beauty*, though here and there we may come upon something rather quaint and piquant?" I think one answer to this not unfriendly critic may be, that they have no living specimens of what is beautiful to our eye, either in man or woman. I have seen, but as exceptions, young girls of fifteen or sixteen, just blooming into maidenhood, with well-fashioned features, graceful forms, and sweet expression. The latter is indeed by no means rare among the women, even when there is a lack of beauty. But beauty is not common over eastern Asia, among either Mongol, Chinese, or Japanese races. Perhaps, then, they have not unwisely followed the old French counsel, "*Il faut aimer ce qu'on a*"—when we cannot get some other and unattainable object of desire. Besides, love is a great beautifier, just as familiarity tends to hide from our eyes deformity. Do not men and women both always find something to admire in the faces of those they love? The Japanese, then, like their western critics, have simply followed universal law, and ended by ad-

miring what they began by loving. The critic of their artistic work suggested another subject of reproach to which he thought they were open, and I confess myself unable to make an equally satisfactory defence. "There does not seem to be the least trace of sentiment or kindness between the human specimens of the race," he observed, on another occasion. "They all look at each other hatefully, spitefully, absurdly, never tenderly! But the heart of the artist must often have looked tenderly and deeply at the inanimate or inarticulate subjects of his pencil." And he concludes, as I must also, I am afraid, by exclaiming: "I do not understand it! An art which is blind to beauty, virtue, pathos, piety, everything charming and elevating in man, and which discovers all in trees and brutes, and hills, and lakes, and skies! Some one should write a monograph on Japanese painting, and explain it all." If any one is prepared to do so, I will gladly resign my pen and the place in the *Art Journal* now I fear somewhat unworthily filled by these contributions to our knowledge of Japanese Art.

DUBLIN SCHOOLS OF ART.

THE Dublin Schools of Art were established in the year 1749, and were called the "Drawing-Schools" of the Royal Dublin Society. From the date of their establishment they received an annual grant from the Irish Parliament of £500, which was continued for 105 years. In 1849 an additional grant of £500 was made by the Board of Trade, upon the amalgamation of the old schools—whose aim was chiefly high Art-education, and which up to this period had produced many eminent artists, among others Sir Martin Archer Shea, Danby, and J. H. Foley, who has so recently passed away in the zenith of his fame—with the newly-instituted "Schools of Design," which had for their object more particularly the application of Art to manufactures. From the date of the establishment of the schools in 1749 to the year 1849 pupils were admitted to study gratuitously, on submitting to the committee specimens of their work, evidencing a certain amount of ability. These arrangements continued in force until 1854, when the entire grant was withdrawn, and the schools were placed under the control of the Science and Art Department. In the year 1849 fees were for the first time paid by the students, and from 1854, when the grant was withdrawn, the schools were expected to become self-supporting, the amount of assistance afforded by the Department depending on the character and extent of the instruction given, being payments made to masters in proportion to their qualifications and the number of their certificates of competency. Assistance was also rendered to deserving students in appointing them prize-students and pupil-teachers and in the purchase of examples, &c. In 1864 payments upon masters' certificates were abolished, and were in some measure replaced by payments on results of examinations. In 1867 the total amount received from the Department was about £110, exclusive of medals, prizes, &c. This amount of aid is

small indeed when compared with the annual vote of Parliament for the advancement of Art in the United Kingdom, and quite inadequate for the support of the schools. The Dublin Society contributes out of its private funds about £100 annually, the pupils' fees averaging between £400 and £500 a year.

Notwithstanding the many disadvantages under which the Dublin Schools labour, instructions, based on the soundest principles and most correct taste in Art, are given in the study of the human form, including the life and the antique, anatomy, and still-life study; original design for manufacture, including the study of plants, flowers, &c., and ornament, from casts and the flat; elementary Art, including geometry, perspective projection, and the copying of flowers, ornament, &c., from flat examples. In all these branches the students have been eminently successful in the local examinations, and in carrying off a larger share of the national awards, in proportion to the number of pupils, than any other considerable Art-schools in the country, with the exception of South Kensington.

From the date of the establishment of these schools to the present time they have been steadily improving, and are now in a high state of efficiency; this is chiefly owing to the zeal and ability of Mr. Lyne, the head-master, to whose indefatigable endeavours for the success of the schools the Fine Arts Committee in their reports have borne ready testimony; and it may be mentioned that it has been within the last twelve years, while under Mr. Lyne's direction, that the schools have made that steady, rapid, and remarkable progress which has secured for them so wide a reputation. It is a fact that they have achieved their recent successes with an expenditure of about half that of the period anterior to 1854, when the institution enjoyed the Government grant of £500 per annum.

THE STRAWBERRY-GIRL.

P. DECONINCK, Painter.

S. S. SMITH, Engraver.

MANY of our readers may probably remember an engraving from a picture entitled 'The Tambourine,' which appeared in the *Art Journal* about three years ago. The painting, which represents a young girl resting her clasped hands on a tambourine, is the work of the same artist, M. Deconinck, of the Franco-Belgian school, who has produced 'The Strawberry-Girl.'

The two young girls present characteristics of form and feature—of nationality indeed—quite distinct from each other. The tambourine-player is a brunette, of Spain possibly, though almost dark enough for a Moor; the vendor of strawberries may

be a native of France or Belgium, for she is comparatively fair, with a childlike face full of the sweetest and most winning expression. The whole upper part of the figure is singularly attractive; the picturesque white cap, the long wavy hair falling carelessly over the shoulders, the dress cut and arranged so as to give breadth and fullness to the composition, the half-droll yet persuasive look with which the fruit is offered for sale, combine into as pretty a picture of its kind as we ever remember in the course of a tolerably long experience; and with the full recollection of many of Sir Joshua Reynolds's pictures of lovable children.